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THOMAS E. BULLARD

UFO Abduction Reports
The Supernatural Kidnap Narrative Returns in Technological Guise

First-person reports of abductions by UFO occupants have grown in number during the past few years, and constitute an unusually well-structured legend type. These accounts share many motifs with legends of supernatural encounters and otherworldly journeys, but reconcile the fantastic elements with a supposedly alien technology to settle comfortably among the rest of UFO lore. Abductions update the content of supernatural kidnap traditions and assume their function.

"BEEN ABDUCTED BY A UFO LATELY? (If not, try a new deodorant!)." A skeptic hands out cards bearing this jibe during the Mutual UFO Network Symposium in Washington, D.C., in June 1987. Few recipients share this negative view and they take the jest unkindly. Most of them have come to hear a panel of four women and four men who claim they were kidnapped by aliens, and two authors, Budd Hopkins and Whitley Strieber, whose books published a few months earlier have raised the subject of UFO abductions to national prominence. Unidentified flying objects have darted in and out of public interest for 40 years. Folklorists also have begun to pay attention to the thriving complex of beliefs and narratives surrounding these mysteries, noting that they supplant traditional concepts about anomalous lights (Hufford 1977a:240), figure in a growing body of memorates (Lowe 1979), compare with many folklore motifs (Sanarov 1981), and as the convention shows, inspire a fervent controversy characteristic of legends (Dégh 1977:243–244).

Of still greater interest to the folklorist is the increasing bizarreness of these reports. UFOs are at once the quintessential stuff of modern legends and a paradox within them. Judging from Jan Harold Brunvand's collections of urban legends (1981, 1984, 1986), the most popular examples today draw their horror or humor from plausible, naturalistic ingredients like hook-armed madmen or stray cuts of rodent in food. Today even paranormal manifestations are subject to scientific investigation in the parapsychology laboratory. Legends have been secularized as belief in traditional forms of the supernatural has dwindled or adapted to a rationalistic environment. UFOs seem ideally suited to the present climate of opinion, since they present a safely mechanical

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appearance and gain popular if little official credibility from current scientific speculations about life on other worlds.

Yet against this secularizing current as well as all expectations, these most technological of all legend subjects more and more often appear in narratives alongside fantastic, very nearly supernatural elements. UFOs defy physical laws by making right-angle turns at high speed or disappearing in mid-flight. Short beings reminiscent of fairies appear from inside the craft. Men in Black haunt witnesses and share significant properties of traditional devils (Rojcewicz 1987). A recent development in UFO lore and one of its fastest growing branches has been the abduction story, a first-person account of capture by alien beings. Abductees are people from all walks of life going about everyday activities when a sudden and unwanted encounter with the unknown occurs. Not only do these reports surpass many folk narratives in circulation today for length and elaborateness, but the contents include a richness of fantastic elements seldom found outside the magical and religious lore of preindustrial times. Abduction accounts converge on supernatural encounter narratives until the two appear inseparable in content and function.

This article derives from a comparative study carried out for the Fund for UFO Research, and is based on some 300 abduction and abduction-like reports (Bullard 1987). Some of them come from sincere and honest informants, others are hoaxes or fantasies. What matters here is not the ultimate nature of the reports but their status as narratives, their form, content, and relationship to comparable accounts of supernatural encounter.

The Emergence of Abductions into Public Awareness

The "first" and still most familiar abduction story came to light almost twenty years after the modern era of flying saucer reports began in 1947. On the night of September 19, 1961, when Barney and Betty Hill drove home from a vacation trip through the White Mountains of New Hampshire, a distant flying light seemed to pace the car. This light neared until it loomed overhead as a huge, lighted disk-shaped craft. A series of beeps sounded and the craft vanished from sight. When the witnesses reached home they noticed that the time was some two hours later than they expected. A spate of nightmares and anxiety-related health problems led the witnesses to seek medical and eventually psychiatric help. Dr. Benjamin Simon, a Boston psychiatrist, carried out hypnotic regression therapy on the Hills and had them relive the lost two hours associated with the UFO sighting. A remarkable story emerged of the witnesses encountering a roadblock manned by short beings with large heads and eyes, small ears and mouths, and hairless ashen-colored skin. These beings controlled the witnesses by apparently hypnotic means and escorted them into a landed saucer-shaped craft. A sometimes gruesome medical examination followed, then the leader conversed for a while with Betty Hill by means of telepathy before releasing the witnesses to continue their drive. All

memory of the past two hours of the experience faded at the sound of the beeps until the nightmares and hypnosis restored full recollection. With the Hills' permission, Dr. Simon allowed *Saturday Review* columnist John G. Fuller access to his files, and Fuller wrote a comprehensive account of this case, published in 1966 as *The Interrupted Journey*. In October of that year *Look* magazine published extracts from the book, and further public exposure resulted from a TV dramatization aired on NBC in October 1975.

The Hill case was not unique even from the start. In the fall of 1957 a Brazilian farmer, Antonio Villas Boas, had reported that a UFO landed on his farm and its crewmembers dragged him aboard. UFO investigators suppressed this story prior to the Hill revelations because it contained the sensationalistic claim that Villas Boas was coerced into sexual relations with an alien woman.

Two nationally publicized cases called further attention to abductions in the 1970s. During an extensive wave of UFO reports in October 1973, Charles Hickson and Calvin Parker, two workmen from Pascagoula, Mississippi, reported that a disk-shaped UFO landed near the spot where they were fishing and they floated inside the craft in the company of three mummylike beings. Parker passed out in terror but Hickson hung suspended in mid-air while an eyelike device scanned his body before the beings released the men some twenty minutes later. Then on November 5, 1975, six members of an Arizona logging crew watched a beam of light from a hovering disk-shaped craft strike a seventh man, Travis Walton. No trace of Walton could be found after the UFO disappeared. For five days searchers turned up no clues, then Walton telephoned his brother and related what he recalled of his five-day absence. After the beam struck him unconscious, he awakened inside a rounded room and found himself surrounded by humanoid beings such as the Hills described. Later several almost-human beings escorted him through a vast hangarlike room containing a number of the disk-shaped craft. He next found himself lying beside an Arizona highway while the UFO ascended above him.

As publicity for abduction cases increased, people stepped forward with accounts of their own similar experiences or symptoms of such experiences. One witness was Massachusetts housewife Betty Andreasson, who saw a luminous object land in her yard and large-eyed humanoids approach her house. An extensive investigation of her case, again by means of hypnosis, revealed that this consciously remembered incident was but one of a series of encounters extending back to childhood. A California woman who came forward with her memories of a peculiar experience soon proved a link in a chain of four other women, all with their own abduction stories to tell. Budd Hopkins, a New York artist, teamed with several psychologists to investigate a number of abduction cases, the most spectacular being the repeated encounters of a young Indianapolis woman. She reported that aliens impregnated her, then in a followup abduction they removed the fetus. Later she was allowed to see the offspring, a hybrid alien and human girl. Perhaps the biggest publicity boost for

abductions came in 1987 with the publication of Whitley Strieber's best-selling *Communion,* an account of the personal abduction experiences of this popular author best known for his horror fiction.

UFO researchers have received a minimum of 600 abduction reports over the years, but a questionnaire published in the December 1987 issue of *OMNI* magazine has drawn some 1200 responses from prospective abductees. Abduction reports are primarily North American, but South America has produced a substantial number, with smaller counts from England and Australia. Continental Europe has provided only a few, though three cases have originated in the Soviet Union. No reports are known from Asia or black Africa. A single witness participates in most abductions, but in 73 out of 300 cases, from two up to seven individuals were taken at the same time. The reports come from males and females alike, and the experience seems independent of income, occupation, or level of education. Psychological tests reveal no overt mental illness of any standard sort (Fund for UFO Research 1985). People of all ages report abductions, but by far the most abductees are less than 35 years old at the alleged time of the first encounter.

Some witnesses are fully conscious of their abduction experience and able to relate it in detail (e.g., Villas Boas, Hickson, Walton). Others suffer a temporary amnesia and then recall the experience through dreams (Betty Hill) or a spontaneous return of memory (Sgt. Moody; see Lorenzen and Lorenzen 1977:38–51). A greater number of abductees tell their full story only under hypnosis, an uncommon way to obtain a narrative but the usual technique for exploring these cases. The witness may have extensive conscious memory and submit to hypnosis only to clarify details (Strieber), or partial memory of a strange experience may lead to a much-enlarged story under hypnosis (Andreasson), or it may reveal a full-blown abduction underlying nothing more apparent than vague anxieties (Barney Hill).

The Folkloric Character of Abduction Reports

Two folk groups with distinctive concerns, aims, and attitudes toward abductions take an interest in this phenomenon, and the result is two different abduction folklores. The most homogeneous group in terms of attitude toward abductions is the ufologists and their alter egos, the skeptics. For ufologists the attitude is one of absolute belief in an extraterrestrial encounter, for skeptics absolute disbelief in any sort of real experience. These individuals usually judge the abduction phenomenon according to their prior convictions about UFOs in general, so belief determines interpretation.

The abductees themselves respond with less certainty. Most of them trust in the reality of their experience, sometimes with considerable emotion and at other times with the quiet earnestness of Barney Hill, who defended his abduction with the following words when his psychiatrist attempted to explain it as a fantasy:

> Then if this person kept insisting that I didn't [have this experience], in the face of my knowing that I did, I would have to terminate the conversation and leave it at that. I'd reach the point where I'd say to myself, "I cannot convince this person, and he cannot convince me. There's no issue. I can drop it." [Fuller 1966:320]

Beyond this basic faith that something real and strange happened to them, a great deal of puzzlement often besets the abductees. They only occasionally share the ufologists' certitude about the nature of the experience and may be reticent to settle on any explanation. The bizarreness of the experience may leave abductees in such a quandary that they will affirm that the encounter happened to them, then deny that they believe it in the same breath (Fuller 1966:328). Abductees illustrate David J. Hufford's principle that beliefs and traditional ideas may follow from experience, rather than precede or determine it (1977b:14–15).

Both groups offer a clearer and more colorful expression of belief when they attempt to explain the abduction experience. Skeptics have attacked abduction stories as hypnotically induced fantasies and accounted for conscious reports as hoaxes or fantasies derived from familiarity with published accounts and science fiction (Baker 1988; Fuller 1966; Klass 1988; Lawson 1980). One theorist traces the content of the stories to birth trauma and perinatal memories (Lawson 1982), another favors waking dreams or false awakenings (Basterfield 1981), yet another resorts to the archetypes of psychologist C. G. Jung (Clark and Coleman 1975:178–192), while a fourth rationalizes the experience as subjective effects of electromagnetic radiation from tectonic stress in rocks (Devereux 1982:70–72). Protestant fundamentalists predictably interpret abductions as the work of demons (Wilson and Weldon 1978). For New Age advocates and holistic psychologists, abductions mark a change from limited rationalistic modes of thinking to a higher consciousness, an initiation of abductees into richer ways of thinking and living (Thompson 1988).

Most UFO researchers and believers see abductions as part of a scientific survey of Earth carried out by extraterrestrials (Fowler 1979:189–190), though the community divides over whether they simply exploit us, perhaps for genetic materials (Hopkins 1981:218–222), or use secretive contacts as a first step toward introducing the people of Earth to cosmic citizenship (Sprinkle 1980). A few thinkers reject the physical aliens and opt for some sort of unseen intelligence, perhaps nonphysical coinhabitants of the Earth or a mindlike something of cosmic proportions, which now and then intrudes into the physical world to manipulate or recondition human thought and behavior through strange, sometimes absurd experiences (Keel 1975:59–62, 101, 188; Vallee 1975:196–206). A sort of cultural deconstruction results from UFO experiences as they call into question each conventional answer we promote as their final solution. As our explanations fail in turn, so must our confidence in established understanding (Raschke 1981:80–82). The abductees themselves also differ in their interpretations. Some favor the extraterrestrial reading (Betty Hill), some take a religious viewpoint (Andreasson), and a few arrive at some

almost mystical conclusion, such as the idea that a vast unknown intelligence coexisting on the Earth—or perhaps synonymous with the Earth—is making contact with us now that we threaten to damage or destroy the planet (Strieber).

The abduction phenomenon is thus no monolithic belief but a plurality of beliefs related to a more or less stable experience claim. Hufford's warning (1983) that scholarly traditions of disbelief are powerful influences in the way folklorists study their materials gains an added dimension in the case of abductions, since the full scope of folklore study includes not just abductees and their reports but also the abduction investigators and their treatment of the accounts. For ufologists abductions are a means to an end—they prove a favorite theory, and become part of the UFO tradition. Fundamentalists, skeptics, and psychologists tie their own preferred traditions to the same reports. Abductees usually pursue a more personal agenda, based on the need to make their peace with an often-disturbing experience. If they lack a belief system able to accommodate the experience, they may embrace the extraterrestrial interpretation when they learn of it from ufologists or popular literature, perhaps not so much because of firm conviction as because this interpretation gives them words to express the ineffable and concepts to grasp the incomprehensible. Abductees may accept a UFO-related origin for their experience with doubt and reluctance (e.g., Hopkins 1981:51–52), and demonstrate the reasoned consideration and regard for alternatives that Hufford sees as characteristic of the way many witnesses approach their extraordinary experiences (1982a:50). Experience, interpretation, personal need, and rival theories complicate the abduction phenomenon with intricate layers and nuances of belief.

Enough key traits of the legend have emerged to make clear the affinity of abduction accounts with this genre. They concern extranormal events, notably a meeting with "otherworldly" and usually nonhuman beings possessed of extraordinary powers, much like the traditional supernatural beings of belief legends (Dégh 1972:76). The welter of diametrically and tangentially opposed beliefs among bearers of the abduction tradition conforms to the dialectic pattern of communication indicative of an active legend (Dégh and Vázsonyi 1971:298–301; 1978:254–257). Abductees are typical legend actors, hapless victims rather than heroes, who encounter the unknown while going about such mundane activities as driving on a lonely road, fishing after work, washing dishes, or lying in bed at home. No one is safe, no one chosen for any apparent reason other than availability. This vulnerability of the innocent to external powers expresses the ultimate message of abductions and also reflects the distinctive viewpoint of the legend (Lüthi 1976:24). The first-person character of abduction reports readily locates them among memorates, here regarded as a subgenre of the legend and not as personally unique narratives (Stahl 1977:21–23). However classified, these reports remain somewhat peculiar. They are first-person and highly personal, yet their content is recurrent and the story they tell as complex as many fabulates.

The Structure of Abduction Reports

The abduction story consists of a maximum of eight episodes in the following order:

1. *Capture*. Strange beings seize and take the witness aboard a UFO.
2. *Examination*. These beings subject the witness to a physical and mental examination.
3. *Conference*. A conversation with the beings follows.
4. *Tour*. The beings show their captive around the ship.
5. *Otherworldly Journey*. The ship flies the witness to some strange and unearthly place.
6. *Theophany*. An encounter with a divine being occurs.
7. *Return*. At last the witness comes back to Earth, leaves the ship, and reenters normal life.
8. *Aftermath*. Physical, mental, and paranormal aftereffects continue in the wake of the abduction.

The capture episode has four parts of its own: (1) alien intrusion by a UFO or strange being, (2) entry into a zone of strangeness where physical laws begin to fail, (3) onset of the time lapse when the witness becomes in some way mentally impaired, and (4) actual procurement of the witness by the beings. Procurement itself unfolds into a complex subepisode as a beam of light strikes and a drawing force pulls the witness; beings approach and a brief conversation ensues; they pacify, escort, and float the witness on board the craft; and the witness experiences a momentary loss of memory, or doorway amnesia, while entering.

Examinations also follow a regular progression as the beings undress, cleanse, and position the witness on an examination table. The procedures move from the general to the specific as the beings first subject the witness to manual exploration, then use an eyelike scanning device, and next instruments to probe the body. Specimens of skin, blood, or other body fluids are taken, the reproductive areas examined, and finally the beings turn attention to the neurological system and implant a tiny device into the brain of the conscious witness. The return episode largely reverses capture, beginning with a farewell and continuing with doorway amnesia as the beings escort the witness out of the ship. After watching the craft depart, the witness resumes previous activities and loses conscious memory of the abduction.

The order of abduction reports amounts to a complex type, and most actual narratives adhere to it. Not every report contains all possible episodes, nor every episode all possible events. Capture and examination are the most common episodes, while theophanies occur in only six cases. When more episodes than the obvious capture and return appear together, the order conforms to the above prescription in 163 out of 193 cases. For reports with complex capture and procurement sequences, fidelity to type runs just above 75%; for examination and return, two-thirds of the cases hold true to type.

Though a stereotypical sequence of events recurs from case to case, this order serves no apparent aesthetic function. Abduction reports share none of the subtle artistry of urban legends. No plot ellipsis or delayed orientation adds suspense or surprise to the narrative (Barnes 1984:72; Nicolaisen 1987:70–72), and the return is something of a letdown as an ending after the fantastic events aboard ship. Descriptions of the beings may include a transformation in attitude toward their captive from unfriendly to friendly, but rather than developing character this change strikes the listener as jarring because it seems unmotivated, out of the blue, and out of place in terms of all that has gone before. The examination climaxes many reports with an appropriately gripping center of attention, but in other cases interest drifts toward the conference or otherworldly journey, so any comparison with dramatic structure seems merely coincidental. Return is a natural place for the story to finish, yet it often resists closure by spilling over into a prolonged and personal aftermath. What makes these narratives even more paradoxical is the fact that no logic obliges conferences to follow examinations or reproductive tests to follow scans, yet narratives seldom violate this sequence, keeping it despite the fact that the actual narration is often disjointed, halting, and made in a state of emotional excitement. The order of these narratives belongs to the structure of the alleged experience itself. Content tells the story and the order is simply part of that content, with no further shaping for artistic form. The result is thrilling enough as a straightforward report without literary sophistication.

Stable Content Elements

Many striking content motifs recur throughout abduction reports. A list of occasional motifs runs into the hundreds, but a core of similar descriptions relating to the craft, the beings, and unusual feelings or occurrences reappears in a majority of cases. Witnesses most often describe the craft as disk-shaped, the examination room as circular and domed without sharp corners, and its lighting as diffused and uniform without any particular source. The interior has spare furnishings, usually only an examination table. Temperatures are cold and the air is heavy, misty, or hard to breathe. Doors open out of nowhere and close without leaving any visible crack or seam.

The commonest beings are humanoids three to five feet tall with large hairless heads and tapering chins. The eyes are enormous and extend around the side of the head to give a "wraparound" effect. All other facial features are vestigial, with the mouth being no more than a slit or lipless hole, the nose almost nonexistent except for air holes, and the ears tiny or absent. Most descriptions of the skin call it ashen or gray, often soft and funguslike, as if never exposed to sunlight. Some beings are frail and slender, but others seem more robust with large chests. The limbs are usually thin and the arms may extend to the knees, while the hands sometimes have only three fingers. The legs may be unusually short or oddly jointed, so the beings walk with a clumsy gait.

Some witnesses attribute sexual differences to the beings, though the distinctions are seldom obvious and other abductees consider the beings neuter. Clothing almost always consists of tight-fitting one-piece uniforms, occasionally augmented by a belt or a hood fitted closely around the head. One being serves as a leader or liaison with the captives and communicates with them by telepathy, giving reassurances and imparting special messages, while the rest of the crew seem cold and unfriendly. Most of the time the beings show no emotion, but they are capable of surprise, anger, irritability, and excitement.

A host of physical and mental special effects surrounds the abduction experience and lends it much of its surreal quality. When the UFO appears a silence may fall over the scene and the whole event may occur as if within a vacuum; traffic may cease or passersby fail to notice that anything strange is going on. Drivers may lose control of their vehicles and cars seem to drive themselves. The beings sometimes pass ghostlike through solid doors or windows, and defy gravity by floating above the ground. Humans acquire this power when in the company of the beings. One of the commonest attributes of the abduction experiences is the time lapse, a period of amnesia blocking out conscious memory of the time of captivity and imposed by the beings through something like hypnotic control. Witnesses also report paralysis or loss of will, especially an artificial euphoria alternating with onrushes of terror whenever the beings' control influences wear off. A desire to look down or close the eyes is common among witnesses and usually attributed to the beings' aversion to anyone looking at them. In one striking incident repeated often since, the beings inserted a long needle into Betty Hill's navel and caused her intense pain, but the leader touched her on the forehead and the pain immediately eased.

Equally diverse aftereffects crowd into the life of a witness in the wake of an abduction. The immediate aftereffects are physical and include burning eyes, sunburned skin, puncture wounds, and gastrointestinal upset. Acute thirst often follows an abduction, and many witnesses feel dirty or in need of a bath. These problems pass within a few days or weeks and then intermediate effects of a mental nature set in. The witness suffers nightmares or flashbacks, indefinable attacks of anxiety, and a sense of panic from an innocuous situation like sitting in a doctor's office. Long-term aftereffects are even more notable. A personality change for better or worse may occur, with new interests and abilities developing while old habits cease. In some instances abductees go on to become more curious, outgoing, and humane, though in a few cases individuals have become erratic and their personalities have unraveled. A common element of the aftermath is further contact with the paranormal. Extrasensory abilities may develop, poltergeist activity occur, Men in Black appear, and most often, further abductions or encounters with the alien beings take place.

Enough alternatives exist for many of these motifs to prove they are true narrative variables: A few abductees describe the craft as cigar shaped, and the Hills reported a wedge-shaped examination room. Beings may be humanoid,

human, or monstrous, with about two-thirds of 203 cases with beings specified favoring the humanoid. Humans make up most of the remainder and truly strange creatures are quite rare, despite long years of indoctrination by images of the bug-eyed monsters so beloved of Hollywood and science fiction literature. The short or "standard" humanoid described above predominates among reports, but tall humanoids also appear, some of them with hair or other atypical features, and a few deviant humanoids like the Pascagoula mummies round out the sample. Differences sometimes cluster on a geographical basis, so English reports favor humanlike aliens and South American reports the tall humanoids, suggesting national versions of the abduction legend may exist.

Themes of the Abduction Story

1. *Focus on Reproduction.* Throughout the history of abductions the beings have shown a keen interest in reproduction, an interest expressed in the old-fashioned way for Villas Boas and with greater technological sophistication for the Indianapolis woman whose fetus was removed, but present in some form or other in many accounts. Male abductees may report sperm samples taken and females a long needle inserted into the navel or abdomen for what the beings identify as a pregnancy test, while both sexes experience some inspection of the genital area. More than evenhanded scientific curiosity appears to motivate this attention, since the examiners devote a disproportionate amount of time and effort to the reproductive system at the relative expense of other equally significant bodily systems. In one case the abductors say outright that their mission is to build a better being by combining their qualities with those of humans (Druffel and Rogo 1980:165, 169). In other cases abductees have seen nurseries and hybrid children (Hopkins 1987:164–186). Less direct references, where one man was rejected because of a vasectomy and another as too old and infirm for the beings' purposes, indicate a depth of consistency in this theme.

2. *The Dying Planet.* When abductees visit the otherworld it is frequently a dim, desolate, or devastated place where little or nothing grows and the beings live in enclosed cities. If the otherworld is lush and green it is an underworld without a specific light source or horizon, and the visitor reaches this paradise only after passing through a tunnel or a barren, unpleasant area (Fowler 1979:77–84). Something seems clearly amiss with the beings' home planet. They may confess that a catastrophe has overtaken them and that they seek a new home. One being stated that his planet was no longer fertile and his mission to Earth was to gather plants and animals as breeding stock (Sprinkle 1979:306–307). Tying this theme with reproductive interests, several beings have complained that their species is no longer fertile, so they seek to rejuvenate their stock with human genetic materials.

3. *Prophecies and Warnings.* The conference episode and to a lesser extent the farewell allow the beings a chance to leave messages with the abductee. Ex-

planations and questions make up part of these conferences, but their main substance consists of warnings that humans are on a path to nuclear, ecological, or moral destruction and prophecies of a coming time of tribulation or cataclysm. In other words, Earth is well on its way to the fate already suffered by the aliens' planet. Then the beings offer a ray of hope with the promise that they will help prevent this apocalypse, and charge the witness with a mission to aid the work of salvation. The abductee should study religion, philosophy, or occult wisdom and become more caring, loving, and thoughtful of others. The beings request the abductee help them learn more about human emotions, apparently an especially difficult concept for the visitors, either by observing for them or even by bringing other people for the beings to study. These efforts serve in some obscure way the cause of saving the Earth, and the beings may promise the abductee some special but again obscure role when the crisis begins.

4. *Deceit and Indifference.* On the surface the beings appear altruists motivated only by kindness and goodwill despite their abrupt methods. A surprising number of abductees reverse their attitude by the time they depart from the ship and actually regard the experience in a positive light, thinking of the leader as a friend and feeling a loss or sadness that the experience is finished. At the same time a sharp ambivalence pervades the testimony even of favorably inclined witnesses. The beings are often scrupulously polite, but some abductees sense a cold indifference underneath this facade of courtesy, a disregard for human suffering or perhaps no understanding of it. Some abductees complain that they were treated like guinea pigs and merely used by the beings. Betty Hill and Betty Andreasson suspected that the crew was unfriendly and wanted to carry out further tests, though the leader intervened to protect the captives. Manipulativeness is another common complaint lodged against the abductors. They may phrase their instructions as requests, but some abductees realize that they were compelled to obey by a kind of hypnotically repeated insistence. Even the change of attitude about the abduction seems an unnatural consequence of mood manipulation. Many abductees express distrust of the beings, while clues of a hidden agenda abound. Abductions begin with the beings tense and anxious. They relax only after the examination is completed, so the examination seems to be the real purpose behind the abduction. When the beings inform the witness of their place of origin, the answer is always absurd, and all specific prophecies have failed to come true. Lies, veiled threats, broken promises, and the beings' aversion to human gaze count among the reasons why some abductees mingle their positive feelings with doubts about the motives and sincerity of the aliens.

Any discussion of themes must rely more on a broad sample of reports than on the insights individuals derive from their one or a few personal encounters. UFO researchers who take abductions as literal facts are the usual sources for speculations about the nature and purposes of these events, and promote the idea that aliens need genetic materials or carry out hybrid breeding programs

to save a dying species (Hopkins 1981:216–223). This interpretation unifies the themes by explaining a concern with reproduction in terms of the dying planet, while the prophecies are part of the aliens' disinformation campaign, used to win over abductees as more or less willing participants in future abductions. Who would refuse to spare a little blood or endure a little pain when convinced the survival of the world is at stake? Other suggestions have turned to the venerable notion of alien invasion, with the hybrids serving as a way the extraterrestrials can occupy the Earth as a new home, while the lies and altruistic posturings simply hide the sinister true intentions. According to some accounts, these hybrids already walk among us and pass for normal people (personal communication 1988).

If an effort to find literary unity in abduction themes seems far-fetched, their latent potential for elaboration is illustrated by a recent rumor intertwining abductions with another branch of UFO lore. Ever since the early 1950s, stories of crashed saucers in government hands have turned up from time to time. The Freedom of Information Act opened a new era in this line of research, and the burgeoning literature includes many references to "MJ-12," a group of top-level scientists and military officers entrusted with the knowledge of this crash (Friedman 1987). President George Bush is alleged to be a current member of MJ-12. New revelations of unknown source but now circulating within the UFO community expand on these claims to add that MJ-12 later met with live aliens and made a treaty with them to exchange information for the right to carry out an abduction program. Its purpose was supposed to be scientific and its scope small, but the aliens duped the earthlings and burrowed a vast complex of tunnels beneath New Mexico and many other parts of the Southwest. Abductions then became something of an industry—guess where all those missing children pictured on milk cartons go—and the purpose is to obtain a food supply. The aliens draw nutrients from human blood. Terrified that matters had gotten so far out of hand, the government attempted to remove the invaders by military action, but several scores of soldiers were killed in the effort. The aliens remain in their tunnels, growing in number and power. For this reason former President Reagan initiated his "Star Wars" program, not as a defense against the Soviets, but against our unwanted subterranean guests (personal communication 1988).

Parallels in Folk Tradition

Abduction reports enjoy the distinction of having no close antecedents in earlier UFO lore. Nothing like the present narratives appears among reports from the 1897 airship wave, often full of foreshadowings, nor during the 1950s when most stories of contacts described beautiful, philosophical Venusians or fleeting glimpses of short humanoid beings. Yet for all the science fiction trappings, abduction reports sound like rewrites of older supernatural encounter traditions with aliens serving the functional roles of divine beings or nature

spirits. The resemblance between UFO lore of all sorts and traditions of contact with the supernatural is explored at great length by Hilary Evans (1984, 1987), who finds considerable unity underlying these traditions, despite their diversity of outward form. An outline of comparative categories cannot begin to exhaust the similarities of details, but it will suffice to suggest how closely analogy binds this new lore to the old.

1. *Visits to and from the Otherworld.* A widespread assumption in many traditions is an otherworld where gods, demons, fairies, spirits of the dead, or other mysterious beings dwell. This otherworld may lie beneath the ground, in the air, or at some inaccessible distance away, but these secret places of the Earth offer the same cosmological sanctuary for extraordinary beings as other planets in modern scientific or science fiction speculations. Fairyland or the realm of the dead is often subterranean. Entry may be through a prehistoric mound, which occasionally rises on pillars of brilliant light to resemble a landed UFO (Briggs 1978:103). The visitor may pass through caverns to a more spacious area where no sun shines and only a perpetual half-light illuminates the landscape (F211.3; Briggs 1976:119). The abductees' otherworld is sometimes an underworld with these same characteristics, especially in the two journeys of Betty Andreasson. Her otherworld was as much a place of extraordinary beauty as traditional fairylands. In one scene a being escorted her through a large forest made entirely of fine crystal, where transparent flowers and butterflies momentarily acquired color and life when she touched them (Fowler 1980:122–126). In a sense the otherworld experience merely enlarges and externalizes the sights seen inside the ship, since captives sometimes pass through a corridor as they enter and spend most of their stay in a rounded room with uniform illumination. Every descent into the craft becomes a rudimentary subterranean journey.

Whole societies of humanoid beings populate this otherworld. Celtic fairies and Germanic dwarfs match the aliens in many attributes, being often shorter than humans and possessed of large heads and piercing eyes, though hairlessness is a rare trait (Briggs 1976:109–111, 337–338; Heide 1976:38). A limp or clumsy gait is common among these beings and aliens alike (Briggs 1978:170; Heide 1976:46–47). Just as aliens often float to overcome their handicap, some races of fairies and the troops of spirits composing the Wild Hunt fly through the air (F282; Briggs 1976:148–150). How closely fairies and aliens sometimes compare can be judged by Betty Andreasson's account of her second encounter with an alien being. When she was playing in the woods at age 12, the being emerged headfirst out of a hole in the ground and stood before her dressed in a suit so rough-textured that it resembled the bark of a tree. She tossed stones at the being, but they fell to the ground without touching him (Fowler 1980:80–93). Another chthonic entity figures in the experience recalled under hypnosis by a repeat abductee. He was four years old when a small elflike being dressed in green invited him to play, then entered into his body. They went some distance to reach a hole in the ground and fell into an underworld of

rooms and corridors, where the boy underwent parts of the standard examination (personal communication 1986).

Whether these otherworld dwellers are truly supernatural or essentially mortal cohabitants of the Earth, they almost always demonstrate skills and powers beyond the abilities of ordinary humans. For dwarfs this superiority may take the form of fine craftsmanship, but with fairies these skills usually pass into the realm of magic. Even the best fairy magic has definite limits. It often depends more on trickery and illusion than real power over humans or the natural world, as when fairies animate a stock to appear like the human they have stolen or give rich and splendid gifts that prove to be leaves and ordure once the magical spell breaks. Without a magical veil even the beautiful fairyland may be a squalid and ugly place, no better off than the desolate otherworld abductees describe (Briggs 1976:191). The aliens of abduction stories possess an advanced science and technology with many attributes of magic, but here too a fallibility shows through when the beings instruct witnesses to forget but they remember anyway, or more generally, when the superscience of the aliens proves little advanced over our actual capabilities and on a par with our fictional anticipations. Like fairies, aliens depend on deception as a key tool in their bag of tricks.

Contact with the otherworld and its inhabitants is fraught with danger for humans. A common peril for unfortunate people whether out in the open or within their own homes is kidnap by a marauding troop of fairies, a fate sometimes deserved, but often determined in traditional legends as well as in abduction reports by nothing more than the bad luck of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Aliens disorient their captives and isolate them from the everyday environment during capture; fairies likewise confuse and bewilder travelers, cause paralysis with a touch, and violate the familiar laws of nature within the fairy circle (F369.7, F361; Briggs 1976:152; 1978:18, 120). The famous motif of a supernatural lapse of time in fairyland (F377) involves a slower passage of time there than in the ordinary world, so that human visitors think they have been away a matter of hours when in fact decades or centuries have elapsed. An equally prominent time lapse occurs in abductions, but it is a mental rather than a physical phenomenon, a loss of memory rather than a loss of years. Still, abduction reports and fairy legends share the notion of a distortion of the temporal continuum. The positive consequences of abductions echo the fortune of a visitor to fairyland who returns with second sight or knowledge of the future (F239.1; Briggs 1978:85–87). On the unfavorable side, many visitors come home demented, physically injured, or liable to pine away for the beauty of the otherworld (F329.3; Briggs 1978:47). These outcomes parallel the fates of some abductees, though negative consequences seem far more numerous in fairy legends.

Aliens treat their captives with politeness, but surface behavior clashes with an underlying indifference or even cruelty. This same tension characterizes many supernatural encounter legends as well. A strict code of etiquette gov-

erns fairies and dwarfs in their relationships with humans, while fairies with hollow backs and dwarfs with clubfeet dislike anyone to look on their deformities (Briggs 1976:233). Not only are the abductors often annoyed when a captive observes them, but in one case the being, named Ausso, always faced the witness and never permitted a view of his back (Sprinkle 1979:265). Few incidents in fairy lore compare very closely with the bodily violations suffered by abductees during the examination, though in broader terms, fairies are quick to punish a transgression by sometimes drastic means and exhibit callous disregard for victims in sports like elfshots and by leading people astray. A captive in fairyland may escape through the kindness of a fellow human who is condemned to remain there (F376; Briggs 1976:388). Abduction stories occasionally provide a perverse variant of this motif, since several abductees have reported an ordinary human aboard the spaceship who could have been pulled off the street or out of bed just like them, but who assists the aliens in the examination and tells lies to win the cooperation of captives. These traitors provoke more expressions of anger than the aliens themselves (Lorenzen and Lorenzen 1977:19–20).

The reproductive theme so prominent in abduction reports recurs as a staple throughout the lore of supernatural contact and kidnap. Greek mythology portrays Zeus as a notorious lecher prone to carry off mortals, and tells of Pluto taking Persephone to Hades while her mother Demeter deprives the earth of its fertility. Genesis 6:4 says that "the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children unto them. . . ." Demons seduce humans in their sleep as incubi and succubi, La Llorona lures men with sexual attractiveness, and the devil as a handsome man may seduce and carry off a young woman. Even the dead, or at least the undead, feed on the lifesblood or sexual energies of the young and virile. Of course sex is always a topic of interest in or out of narratives. What makes fairies especially significant in this connection is the fact that they are somehow not reproductively self-sufficient and depend to a degree on humans. Fairies mate with humans, carry off women to fairyland, exchange their elderly for human babies, and seek a mortal midwife to assist at a fairy birth (F301, F322, F321.1, F372.1; Briggs 1978:145–148, 109–110, 102, 93–100). This reproductive parasitism bears a close resemblance to the relationship between humans and aliens depicted in abduction accounts. A few abductees have dreamed of "wise babies," wizened infants of extraordinary frailness who speak with mature wisdom and seem to be hybrids under care of the aliens (Hopkins 1987:165–173). In appearance and behavior these babies resemble changelings, and bring to mind the belief that the offspring of humans and fairies have unusual powers (F305; Briggs 1978:142).

2. *Initiations, Conversions, and Final Judgments.* If visits to fairyland lack suitable equivalents for the examination episode, certain religious traditions highlight a physical ordeal as the central motif in an otherworldly visit. What perhaps comes most readily to mind is the judgment and ultimate fate of the soul

after bodily death. In one ancient Egyptian version of judgment the deceased stands before Osiris and the assembled gods of the underworld in a subterranean chamber, and there Anubis weighs the heart on a scale while a monstrous animal called the "Devourer of Souls" watches the outcome with greedy eyes (Budge 1979:110–156). A reckoning of deeds and punishment for the wicked hold prominent places in Zoroastrian, Islamic, and Christian beliefs, while a popular version of the Christian hell prescribes devils to skewer sinners with pitchforks or other sharp instruments. Dante's *Divine Comedy* culminates a long tradition of folk and literary descriptions of visits to hell, wherein the visitor undergoes a perilous tour of the underworld, witnesses the agonies of eternal punishment, and comes back personally reformed as well as a wiser adviser to others (Himmelfarb 1983; Zaleski 1987). Theological overlays separate religious beliefs from abductions, but both descriptions share the idea of an evaluative process by extranormal beings using instruments in an unearthly environment, and both are fraught with images of pain and torture.

What the rite of passage from life to death fails to include is the possibility of personal change. Everything is settled with inappropriate finality as soon as the day of judgment dawns. More comparable to abductions are visits to hell when the witness reforms as a consequence of the experience, and a happier otherworldly journey recorded in considerable numbers recently, known as the near-death experience. Some people pronounced clinically dead but subsequently revived have told of floating out of their bodies and rushing through a tunnel to a brilliantly lighted paradise, but soon have to return to their bodies despite a keen sense of regret (Ring 1985:36–38). Little of the ordeal or aliens-and-spaceship imagery appears in these accounts, but the aftermath bears similarities as the witnesses break with their past lives to become more spiritual, develop psychic powers, and see apocalyptic visions (Ring 1985:50–219).

Puberty rituals or initiations for a mystical vocation engage harrowing events for purposes of life transformation, and compare best of all. The death and rebirth visions of initiates who seek spiritual powers in the otherworld often include a gruesome dismemberment and reassembly of the body carried out by supernatural beings. In the case of the Siberian shaman some of the details bear striking similarities with abduction reports: The experience may begin when the shaman-to-be enters a deathlike trance or coma, two helpful spirits may provide an escort, friendly spirits may help while unfriendly spirits harm the candidate, dismemberment may occur in a rounded cave with uniform lighting, the head or brain may be removed and the eyes torn out (Eliade 1974:34–58). For Betty Hill, long needles in the navel counted as the worst part of her experience, but a few abductees complain of even more alarming treatment. One man recalled under hypnosis that at age five a team of abductors split him open from breastbone to pubic bone and performed some sort of operation on his internal organs, then sealed him up by a means that left no trace. He saw blood but felt no pain during the procedure (personal communication, 1986). Another abductee reported that the beings removed her brain

and set it beside her (Clark 1980:146), while Betty Andreasson stated that the examiner pulled her eyeball from its socket in order to insert an object into her brain. The beings implant a tiny beadlike object, sometimes interpreted as a control or monitor device, into the head or spine of many abductees (Fowler 1980:165–175; Hopkins 1987:58–59; Strieber 1987:28). These objects usually rest on the point of a long needle and may enter the body through a nostril or ear as well as behind the eyeball. Shamanic initiates too may receive inserts in the form of a rock crystal enclosed into their bodies to provide special powers (Eliade 1974:45).

Ordeals are a means to an end in the dynamic process of initiation. Candidates often suffer isolation in a sacred environment, cleansing and purification, bodily destruction and reconstruction, all in all a long litany of pain and terror. At the same time initiates acquire knowledge and skills imparted by higher beings, and assume the rights and responsibilities of a new status (Eliade 1965:4–5). The initiate dies and is born again a different person—literally in shamanic accounts, symbolically in rituals such as Christian baptism. A definite and positive purpose justifies the ordeal in these cases. Abductees also are torn away from familiar surroundings and suffer in a strange environment, and here too runs the idea that abductees emerge as rebuilt and improved people, though mainly as an undercurrent. Most notably in the Andreasson case and to a lesser degree in others, cleansing and examination lose some of their clinical, utilitarian qualities when followed by aspects of transformation. In her case the beings add thoughts and knowledge as a way of making her a better spiritual guide for other people.

For many abductees their encounter marks a turning point in their lives, though the cause-and-effect relationship between the experience and the changes remains unclear. Some abductees alter long-standing habits, preferences, and personality traits, sometimes at the direct behest of the beings and sometimes for no known reason (Bullard 1987:157). Religious conversions share this power to make sudden and radical changes in people's lives. Jesus appeared to Saul of Tarsus out of a great radiance invisible to his traveling companions, and as a result the greatest opponent of Christianity became Paul, its foremost apostle. Joseph Smith met angels who led him to the Book of Mormon and through it to the foundation of a new religious sect. No abductee has yet become a major leader, but a strong sense of purpose has overtaken some abductees and motivated them to acquire more education or change jobs (Druffel and Rogo 1980:9–10). Several years after his abduction, Charles Hickson announced that he is to be a liaison between earthlings and the aliens. No suggestion has arisen that people are abducted for their sins, but a few reports hint that the beings have chosen some people for special qualities like psychic abilities, spiritual purity, or an openness of mind (Bullard 1987:106). Combined with messages, missions, and warnings, this chosen status leaves abductees sounding as if they have heard the call of the prophet.

3. *A Modern Tradition?* Many themes and images in abduction reports lie closer to home than fairy lore or initiation ritual, as close in fact as the movie

theater. A major scientific controversy during the late 19th and early 20th centuries concerned the supposed canals of Mars and the proof they seemed to offer for an advanced civilization there. Percival Lowell, the astronomer who was chief proponent and publicist for the canals, argued that they carried the last remaining water for the inhabitants of a dying planet (Crowe 1986:480–546). This theory enjoyed much popular and little scientific support, but furnished science fiction and adventure writers with a fertile source of story material. H. G. Wells carried the dying planet theme one step further in *The War of the Worlds* (1897): If the Martians were advanced enough to undertake planetwide engineering projects, they would find a way to save themselves by escaping to a more hospitable planet like Earth. This most famous invasion from Mars novel caused a panic when Orson Welles broadcast an adaptation on Halloween, 1938, and the story again proved its resiliency when George Pal directed a movie version in 1953.

Aliens have become a fixture in popular culture, described and depicted countless times in pulp literature, comic books, cartoons, television series, and movies. The image of the alien has only occasionally squared with the humanoids of abduction reports, but Wells made a pertinent contribution when he added an evolutionary perspective to his Martians and enlarged their brains at the expense of their bodies. A large head, browless eyes, and hairless skin combined with a small, frail body match the aliens of abduction stories with the evolutionally advanced aliens of imaginative fiction. Wells also speculated that the Martians' digestive systems had so atrophied that they took nutrients directly from the blood of lower animals, recalling the more lurid rumors of what abductions are really all about.

Many 1950s science fiction movies lent visual immediacy to themes and images later to appear in abduction reports. In *This Island Earth* (1955) humans captured by the aliens assist in a project to save a besieged and devastated planet. The invaders in *Earth Versus the Flying Saucers* (1956) are frail humanoids who have already lost their planet and seek a new home on Earth. They bring captives into a large circular and domed room inside the craft and steal their thoughts by means of a device suspended from the ceiling. The *Invaders from Mars* (1953) tunnel underground and insert an electrode into the back of the neck of each captive, who then obeys Martian commands. Perhaps the most parallels appear in *Killers from Space* (1953). Here a pilot killed in a jet crash finds himself in an underground operating room with his heart dangling above him as strange beings bring him back to life with surgery that leaves no scar. They have bulging eyes and wear dark, tight-fitting uniforms. Communicating by telepathy, the leader shows the pilot scenes of the destruction of the aliens' home planet and reveals how they will emerge from their tunnels to take over the Earth, but then blocks the human's memory by means of hypnosis and plants orders for him to perform an act of sabotage. These few examples demonstrate that "abduction" motifs circulated widely in popular culture years before abduction reports surfaced. Perhaps casual exposure to the

Saturday matinees of childhood could explain the unusual age distribution of so many abductees.

A more concrete example of the influence of popular culture on abductees is the way some of them achieve a first understanding of their strange memories and learn who to contact for further investigation. A call for personal UFO experiences in the *National Enquirer* first prompted Betty Andreasson to report her recollections, while reading a UFO article in *Saga* magazine led Patty Roach to write to the editors, who passed along her case to a field investigator for the Aerial Phenomena Research Organization (APRO). Sgt. Moody reached UFO investigators through the newsstand magazine *Official UFO*. Budd Hopkins and Whitley Strieber have used television talk-show appearances as a successful way to solicit possible abductees, and many people who report abduction symptoms have responded to the *OMNI* magazine survey from December, 1987. A television movie based on the Hill case introduced millions of viewers to the abduction phenomenon. This movie, *The UFO Incident,* first aired in October 1975 and has reappeared on many occasions. Sandra Larson stated that she had discussed her strange UFO encounter with friends, but realized its nature only after seeing the broadcast. Skeptics have charged that this dramatization planted abduction imagery and a wish to share the experience in a number of minds, then some of these abduction aspirants have attempted to fulfill their wish by seeking out UFO investigators. The most flagrant example, according to Klass, is the Travis Walton case. His nationally publicized story followed the broadcast by less than three weeks (Fowler 1979:18–19; Klass 1988:25–26; Lorenzen and Lorenzen 1977:10, 40, 54).

The Folkloric Significance of Abductions

Abduction reports demonstrate that a complex legend filled with extraordinary content can arise and take hold in modern society. How much credit belongs to mass media is uncertain, but their crucial importance in passing along an awareness of abductions seems undeniable. News reaches the public through best-selling books, popular movies, and TV talk shows, or even by a casual glance at a tabloid newspaper in the grocery checkout lane. Whether the pervasiveness of these ideas causes imaginative fantasies or encourages witnesses to speak up is equally uncertain, but an audience for the stories is assured. The UFO community is both eager to listen and organized to spread the word. National groups with their network of enthusiastic members investigate reports, then communicate findings through organizational newsletters and journals. Not only belief but subscriptions sustain a receptive channel for the reports and their interpretation as alien visitations. Aware of the value of publicity, UFO organizations and researchers relay abduction cases to the news media and thereby complete the cycle of information distribution. Similarly well-established organizations of skeptics counter the proponents'

claims, so arguments as well as testimonies fill articles and letters columns in such publications as the *MUFON UFO Journal, International UFO Reporter,* and *Skeptical Inquirer.* The whole structure of a live and vigorous legend takes shape among widely scattered participants who seldom if ever meet face to face. Dispersal of this folklore by electronic and printed means has become so important that oral transmission plays only a minor role.

Another matter abductions illustrate with unusual clarity is the rising trajectory of a new legend. The Hill case initiated public awareness of the abduction phenomenon in 1966, but no flood of reports followed. Seven years passed before another case made national news and a good ten years before reports became common. Today they spring up like dandelions. Documented from birth to the present active, growing phase, abductions offer a glimpse of how a new idea has fitted into the established UFO mythology.

Taken in the wider context of UFO lore, abductions follow as a reasonable outgrowth of beliefs about technologically advanced aliens come to study the Earth and its inhabitants. The story simply assumes that aliens might do what human scientists do when exploring an unknown land. Many old standbys of UFO reports appear in abduction accounts as well, like a disk-shaped craft, diminutive beings, and electromagnetic effects on vehicles, so abductions remain rooted in UFO tradition despite their many innovations. At the same time abductions rate as a major expansion of the UFO belief system. They allow the narrator to answer questions about how the beings look, what they want, where they come from, how they think, and what is inside the craft, questions with obvious appeal to the curious but difficult to answer in mere reports of lights flying through the night. The abduction story satisfies that curiosity through dramatization rather than speculation, and the result is a more elaborate and thrilling narrative than the subject has sustained heretofore. These are exciting times for proponents: At last they have the inside story to vindicate all their UFO beliefs, and an enlarged meaning to prove those beliefs carry tremendous significance.

The abduction narrative offers exceptional flexibility in relationships with the rest of UFO lore. The basic abduction account usually reappears as a stable core, but the fragmentariness that is characteristic of legends (Dégh 1971:62) manifests itself when this core opens into subsequent UFO sightings, meetings with aliens, and repeat abductions. A new synthesis can arise with surprising speed as abductions join with other UFO beliefs like Men in Black and government coverups of crashed saucers, or even draw current events into the widening mythology. The abduction legend in turn reflects its meanings onto the entire UFO belief complex, unifying the diverse parts into a coherent whole and lending new depth to every part. This legend is at once imperialistic and accommodating, capable of imposing new meanings on old lore but also of adapting to the established context of beliefs. The old and the new grow and merge so harmoniously together that abductions seem a natural part of the UFO phenomenon—and all the more convincing for this reason.

The private beliefs of abductees about their experiences may have little in common with the publicly debated beliefs of ufologists and skeptics. In the public arena abductions become pawns in a larger ideological dispute over the interpretation of these events and how they relate to UFOs in general. Abductions presently rate as such an exciting and important issue for the ufological community because they lend handy support to the most cherished beliefs of this folk group. These narratives come from outside the community through people with no vested interest in confirming an extraterrestrial origin for UFOs, yet the events described in these unsolicited reports seem to confirm that theory with minimal need for interpretation. They set skeptics on the defensive and force them to rely on convoluted appeals to psychology, appeals largely unconvincing to the lay public. If abductions themselves were disqualified somehow as folklore, there would still be a folklore of abductions. It would be the tangle of beliefs that have grown over and beyond the basic testimonies of abductees.

In the middle of this entanglement lie the abduction reports, still the most puzzling and intriguing aspect of the whole matter. Hufford proposes that the recurrent characteristics of some folk narratives may not be the consequence of cultural transmission, but rather the consequence of different narrators sharing the same sort of experience (Hufford 1982b:15–16). A strong case can be built for some traditions beginning with external or internal experience. Peter M. Rojcewicz argues that extraordinary encounter traditions of all sorts relate to one another as parts of a continuum. A stable, perhaps experiential core of phenomena unifies these traditions, while they are differentiated by a wide array of culturally determined surface features (1986). Hufford has found that the phenomena of the Old Hag experience appear in cultural settings where the explanatory tradition is unknown (1982b:113). Near-death experiences likewise maintain a recognizable core from culture to culture (Ring 1982:20). Abductions resemble initiations, narratives of supernatural kidnap and visits to the otherworld in too many aspects of event sequence, content motifs, and thematic clusters for us to expect a full explanation in chance alone. Abduction accounts claim an experience. Their consistency, especially when it reaches down to minute details and comes from people with little knowledge of the abduction literature, seems most easily explained by this experiential assumption.

Whether the experience is objectively real, subjectively real, or the result of transmitted ideas, many claimants react with profound emotion to the conviction that they were abducted by unearthly beings. For some people the experience is as real and upsetting as a crime or accident. An actual encounter with aliens would be shocking, but a vivid subjective experience might provide an equally affecting alternative. If the legend persists as a genre because it expresses a fundamental category of psychological concern (Ranke 1967:23–27), abduction reports may owe their emotional impact to a similar psychological affinity. For some reason abductees take their experiences very much

to heart, a clue perhaps that this type of encounter arises from an internal source, or learned materials deeply internalized.

Why abduction reports should appear in their present form at the present time, if they are motivated by age-old psychological concerns, suggests a fortuitous and recent confluence of factors. Experience of some sort may underlie the reports, but experience alone might not suffice to start an abduction tradition. A raw experience by itself might prove too confusing to report at all, despite its emotional force, or channel through some interpretive tradition like religion to emerge in another form. An evolving UFO tradition provides a ready-made language of description and interpretation suitable for modern times. The experience compares well enough with UFO ideas to fit in with them and take its place within the larger UFO mythology. In turn this well-developed tradition helps shape the personal experiences of abductees into a viable public form, perhaps first in the thoughts of abductees, more certainly later when the accounts pass along to eager proponents and receptive mass media. How much of the final narrative is experience and how much is tradition remains an open question. What seems more certain is that without all of these contributing factors, the UFO abduction legend probably could not exist.

Abductions point to the rise of a technological supernaturalism in UFO reports, where the possibilities of alien science sanction wonders once possible only in magic. In abductions we also reacquaint ourselves with some old enemies. They have always been with us, these creatures lurking in the dark. Once again we are helpless as they swoop down to capture, terrify, and harm us for their own purposes. Science may have evicted ghosts and witches from our beliefs, but it just as quickly filled the vacancy with aliens having the same functions. Only the extraterrestrial outer trappings are new. All the fear and the psychological dramas for dealing with it seem simply to have found their way home again, where it is business as usual in the legend realm where things always go bump in the night.

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